



DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY
ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF THE ARMY
MANPOWER AND RESERVE AFFAIRS
111 ARMY PENTAGON
WASHINGTON DC 20310-0111

JUN 11 2020

The Honorable Doug Collins
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representative Collins:

I have been asked to respond on behalf of Secretary of Defense Mark T. Esper to your May 14, 2020 letter concerning the religious freedoms of Service members. We take the concerns you raise seriously, and we recognize the value of the religious support that chaplains provide to Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen, their Families, and Department Civilians, especially during these unprecedented times.

Both Department of Defense and Department of the Army policy support the rights of Service members to observe the tenets of their respective religion, or to observe no religion at all. We have developed and implemented comprehensive policies and training concerning religious freedom. Within the Army, we anticipate publishing a revision of Army Regulation 600-20 in the near future to place a greater emphasis on the religious freedom protections the Religious Freedom Restoration Act affords. We will continue to update and enhance training, as we publish revised policy. The Army is committed to ensuring the rights of our Soldiers are upheld and that spiritual guidance, religious services, and outreach to Soldiers and their Families are available.

As you may know, due to the COVID pandemic we transitioned to using social media as one of the primary mediums to conduct religious support activities, while continuing to strike the appropriate balance between the Free Exercise Clause and the Establishment Clause. Our commanders, in consultation with their unit ministry teams and servicing legal offices, continue to uphold the rights of Soldiers, consistent with all applicable laws and policies.

In all cases outlined in your letter, the commands that received a complaint sought assistance from their higher headquarters and the Army staff. In response to inquiries, the Army provided guidance to ensure chaplains and commands are able to continue to use social media for religious support activities in compliance with applicable laws and policy.

We continue to strive to provide our Army family with the support services they need during these unique times. Thank you for your letter and your continued support of our Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen, Families, and Civilians.

Sincerely,

E. Casey Wardynski